

# THE ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

# celebrates

## ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

May is Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month – a celebration of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the United States. A rather broad term, Asian-Pacific encompasses all of the Asian continent and the Pacific islands of Melanesia (New Guinea, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, Fiji and the Solomon Islands), Micronesia (Marianas, Guam, Wake Island, Palau, Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Nauru and the Federated States of Micronesia) and Polynesia (New Zealand, Hawaiian Islands, Rotuma, Midway Islands, Samoa, American Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu, Cook Islands, French Polynesia and Easter Island).

Like most commemorative months, Asian-Pacific Heritage Month originated in a congressional bill. In June 1977, Reps. Frank Horton of New York and Norman Y. Mineta of California introduced a House resolution that called upon the president to proclaim the first ten days of May as Asian-Pacific Heritage Week. The following month, Senators Daniel Inouye and Spark Matsunaga introduced a similar bill in the Senate. Both were passed. On October 5, 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed a Joint Resolution designating the annual celebration. Twelve years later, President George H.W. Bush signed an extension making the week-long celebration into a month-long celebration. In 1992, the official designation of May as Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month was signed into law.

The month of May was chosen to commemorate the immigration of the first Japanese to the United States on May 7, 1843, and to mark the anniversary of the completion of the transcontinental railroad on May 10, 1869. The majority of the workers who laid the tracks were Chinese immigrants.



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### DALIP SINGH SAUND

September 20, 1899 – April 22, 1973

Dalip Singh Saund was the first Asian American elected to Congress, yet few know his name. Raised in a small town in Punjab, India, before Indian independence, he was inspired by the speeches of Woodrow Wilson and Abraham Lincoln and decided to set sail to America to study. It was 1920. 37 years later, he was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Congressman Saund was the first Asian American and the first Sikh elected

to the US Congress. Yet having only served three terms in Congress between 1957 and 1963, he is relatively little known.

Though Saund came to study agriculture at University of California Berkeley and wound up with a PhD in Mathematics, he actively engaged with civic issues, both locally and internationally. But life as a Sikh immigrant then wasn't easy. Saund arrived in America at a time of great prejudice against immigrants. The Asiatic Barred Zone Act specifically prohibited Asian nationals to naturalize as US citizens.

Faced with social and institutionalized discrimination, Saund was unable to secure a teaching job. He moved to Imperial Valley, an agricultural community near the border with Mexico, and worked as a farmer. There, Saund began to build himself an American life, and a family. He rose to become a leader in the South Asian American community.

**"Saund was an activist who fought against laws that prevented the path to citizenship for many immigrants," Simran Kaur, Sikh Coalition states. "He advocated for the Sikh and South Asian community's voice to be included in laws and policies that impacted their daily lives."**

In what became a groundbreaking victory, Saund helped lobby for citizenship status for Indian and Filipino immigrants. The Luce-Celler Act was signed into law by President Harry Truman on July 2, 1946. Saund himself became a US citizen three years later. On January 3, 1957, Saund became the first Asian American, the first Indian American, and first member of a non-Abrahamic faith to be sworn into the US Congress.

Saund's Congressional career was cut short when he suffered a stroke in 1962 and never returned to public life. But in one life Saund broke barriers not only for Asian Americans and other immigrant communities, but served as an inspiration for all Americans who believed in hard work and equal opportunities.



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## LARRY DULAY ITLIONG

October 25, 1913 – February 8, 1977

Larry Dulay Itliong, also known as “Seven Fingers”, has been described as “one of the fathers of the West Coast labor movement. Born October 25, 1913 in the Philippines and not having finished grammar school, the self-educated Itliong came to the western United States in 1929. He worked in California and Alaska, becoming involved in union causes in both locations.



In 1956, he founded the Filipino Farm Labor Union in California and came to national prominence in 1965, when he, Philip Vera Cruz, Benjamin Gines and Pete Velasco, walked off the farms of area table-grape growers, demanding wages equal to

the federal minimum wage, that became known as the Delano grape strike. The first wave of Filipinos to the United States, known as manongs — began the grape strike that set the stage for the boycott that would lead Cesar Chavez and thousands of farmworker families to create the nation’s pioneering agricultural labor union, the United Farm Workers. Filipino farm workers organized by Mr. Itliong crowded into the Filipino Community Hall, where Filipino elders still gather. They voted to go on strike against the Delano table-grape growers — a bold, risky move that had been preceded by a successful summertime walkout of hundreds of Filipino and Mexican grape pickers in the Coachella Valley to the south. Fearful of losing their season harvest, the growers capitulated and agreed to a raise. With the formation in 1967 of UFWOC



(United Farm Workers Organizing Committee)

Larry Itliong became Assistant Director to Cesar Chavez in the union that would eventually become the UFW. He resigned from the Union in 1971 and devoted the rest of his life to improving the lives of retired Filipino farm workers.

He has been described as “one of the fathers of the West Coast labor movement.”



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## PATSY MINK

December 6, 1927 – September 28, 2002

"Small in stature but a giant in vision", Patsy Mink began her life on a Maui sugar plantation and rose to become the first Asian American woman and woman of color in the United States Congress, where she served from 1965-1977 and again from 1990 until her death in 2002.

A firecracker and a fighter, she continually pushed the limits of what was acceptable, speaking out early and persistently against the Vietnam War and entering the 1972 presidential primary, making her one of the first women to seek the nation's highest office. She transformed America's schools and universities as the co-author and driving force behind Title IX, later renamed the Patsy T. Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act. The landmark legislation opened up higher education and athletics to women.

**"She shattered the stereotype of the 'typical' Asian-American woman. She's a powerful inspiration for marginalized people, especially women of color, that their voices do count."**

She famously said: "It is easy enough to vote right and be consistently with the majority. But it is more often more important to be ahead of the majority and this means being willing to cut the first furrow in the ground and stand alone for a while if necessary."



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## GRACE LEE BOGGS

Born June 27, 1915

Grace Lee Boggs (b. 1915) is an activist, writer, and speaker whose seven decades of political involvement encompass the major U.S. social movements of the past hundred years. A daughter of Chinese immigrants, Boggs received her B.A. from Barnard College (1935) and her Ph.D. in Philosophy from Bryn Mawr College (1940). She developed a twenty-year political relationship with the black Marxist, C.L.R. James, followed by extensive Civil Rights and Black Power Movement activism in Detroit in partnership with husband and black autoworker, James Boggs (1919-93).

**"We need a vision that recognizes that we are at one of the great turning points in human history when the survival of our planet and the restoration of our humanity require a great sea change in our ecological, economic, political, and spiritual values."**

Grace Lee Boggs's published writings include *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century* (with James Boggs, Monthly Review Press, 1974; reissued with new introduction by Grace Lee Boggs, 2008); *Conversations in Maine: Exploring Our Nation's Future* (with James Boggs, Freddy Paine, and Lyman Paine; South End Press, 1978); and *Living for Change: An Autobiography* (University of Minnesota, 1998). Her writings and interviews with her have also been widely disseminated through newspapers, magazines, websites, and academic journals.

In her nineties, Grace remains much in demand as a public speaker and exceptionally active as a community activist and weekly columnist for the Michigan Citizen. Her many honors include honorary doctorates from the University of Michigan, Wooster College, Kalamazoo College, and Wayne State University; lifetime achievement awards from the Detroit City Council, Organization of Chinese Americans, Anti-Defamation League (Michigan), Michigan Coalition for Human Rights, Museum of Chinese in the Americas, and Association for Asian American Studies; Detroit News Michiganian of the Year; and a place in both the National Women's Hall of Fame and Michigan Women's Hall of Fame.



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### DANIEL KEN "DAN" INOUE

September 7, 1924 – December 17, 2012

Daniel K. Inouye was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, on September 7, 1924. He received his undergraduate degree from the University of Hawaii, and his law degree from George Washington University.

During World War II, Inouye served in the U.S. Army's 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Composed of soldiers of Japanese ancestry, the 442nd became one of the most decorated military units in U.S. history. For his combat heroism, which cost him his right arm, Inouye was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Bronze Star, and the Purple Heart with Cluster.

Inouye practiced law in Hawaii before entering territorial politics in 1954. When Hawaii became the 50th state, he became one of its first representatives in the U.S. Congress, then won election to the U.S. Senate in 1962. Inouye was the first Japanese American to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. He never lost an election in 58 years as an elected official. At the time of his death, Inouye was the second-oldest sitting U.S. senator, after Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey. Senator Inouye gained national distinction in the 1970s as a member of the Senate Watergate Committee and, in 1987, as chairman of the Senate Iran-Contra Committee.

An injustice of another kind was addressed by President Bill Clinton in 2000. Although the actions of the Nisei soldiers of the 442nd Battalion were widely regarded as some of the most courageous of the war, none had been recognized with the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military decoration. After extensive review, the Distinguished Service Crosses awarded to Senator Inouye and 21 other Asian-American heroes of World War II were upgraded to full Medal of Honor status. For some, the honor came too late. Fifteen medals were awarded posthumously, but Senator Inouye and the other survivors were on hand to receive their Medals of Honor from President Clinton at the White House.



**In 2013 Senator Inouye was posthumously awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, becoming the first senator to receive both the Medal of Freedom and the Medal of Honor.**



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#### FRED TOYOSABURO KOREMATSU

January 30, 1919 – March 30, 2005

Shortly after the Imperial Japanese Navy attacked Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, authorizing the Secretary of War and his military commanders to remove all individuals of Japanese ancestry from designated "military areas" and place them in internment camps. When on May 3, 1942, General DeWitt ordered Japanese Americans to report on May 9 to Assembly Centers as a prelude to being removed to the camps, Fred Korematsu refused and went into hiding but was found and arrested. He was held at a jail in San Francisco. Shortly after Korematsu's arrest American Civil Liberties Union in northern California asked him whether he would be willing to use his case to test the legality of the Japanese American internment. Korematsu agreed, and was assigned a civil rights attorney. He was placed on five years' probation and thereafter he and his family were placed in the Central Utah War Relocation Center situated at Topaz, Utah. As an unskilled

laborer, he was eligible to receive only \$12 per month (\$173.21 today) for working eight hours per day at the camp. He was housed in a horse stall with one light bulb, and he later remarked that "jail was better than this." In 1980, President Jimmy Carter appointed a special commission to investigate the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II. The commission concluded that the decisions to remove those of Japanese ancestry to prison camps occurred because of "race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership". In 1988, Congress apologized and granted personal compensation of \$20,000 to each surviving prisoner.

In the early 1980s, while researching a book on internment cases, lawyer and University of California, San Diego professor Peter Irons came across evidence that Charles Fahy, the Solicitor General of the United States who argued *Korematsu v. United States* before the Supreme Court, had deliberately suppressed reports from the FBI and military intelligence which concluded that Japanese-American citizens posed no security risk. Irons concluded that the Supreme Court's decision was invalid since it was based on unsubstantiated facts, distortions, and misrepresentations. On November 10, 1983, his conviction was vacated. Korematsu stood in front of US District Judge Marilyn Patel and said,

**"I would like to see the government admit that they were wrong and do something about it so this will never happen again to any American citizen of any race, creed, or color." He also said, "If anyone should do any pardoning, I should be the one pardoning the government for what they did to the Japanese-American people."**

President Bill Clinton awarded Mr. Korematsu the Presidential Medal of Freedom.



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